THE

Final Straw

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

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MILITARY DECRUITMENT, TRUMP 2.0 & RESISTING NEW EMPIRE

(WITH FIG OF ABOUT FACE)

THE FINAL STRAW RADIO – MARCH 3, 2025

This week, we're featuring an interview with Fig, an anarchist and member of the anti-Imperialist US veterans organization About Face to talk about decruitment, the work of About Face and an assessment of shifts in military priority under the lead of Hegseth towards the southern US border and the Trump administration 2.0's multi-polar spin. There's a lot here and we'll have a transcript in the near future.

About Face: https://aboutfaceveterans.org/
GI Rights Hotline: https://girightshotline.org/
Military Law Task Force of the NLG:
https://nlgmltf.org/

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TSFR: Could you please introduce yourself for the audience with a name, pronouns, and affiliation that you'd like to share?

Fig: I'm Fig. I use they and them pronouns. I'm a white, non-binary but male-presenting person, living on occupied Tsalagi and Shawnee land in southern Appalachia. I'm an anarchist, I'm a gardener. I'm neurodivergent, and I'm a veteran of the US Army. I gave 10 years of my life to the US Empire as an intelligence analyst, intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance operator, a defense contractor, and even a technical writer and flight instructor. I participated in both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and it was the moral injury and ontological shocks that I experienced during this time that ultimately led me to the place that I'm at now. I'm affiliated largely with an anti-imperial veteran organization called About Face: Veterans Against the War. They were my entry point into this movement, into this work, and they educated me on the political realities of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, all things that I wasn't really aware of beforehand. Also About Face has really just been a place that I found safety, validation, mentorship, and an ability to move, act and deconstruct the ideologies and frameworks that led me to the Army. Through the people I've met, through its leadership over time, through the deep transformational work that the organization has done and that I've done to have moved from being a foot soldier for a criminal empire into a person that is struggling for freedom and liberation.

TSFR: Thanks for sharing and for taking the time to have this conversation. The name About Face. In case anyone in the listening audience might not catch the reference, can you say what the name means?

Fig: So an About Face movement is a military marching movement in which you're facing one direction and you turn 180 degrees around. So the name implies a complete turnaround from whatever it is that you were doing, or whoever was doing, within the military. It is the antithesis, the dialectic, to the militarism of the empire.

TSFR: Awesome. Can you tell us a bit about the organization, some history of the group, the values that are shared among folks, and who the members are, what its goals are, that that sort of stuff?

Fig: Sure. I'll just read what the official mission is and then talk about my values and my experiences with the membership. Our mission states that we are post-911 service members and veterans organizing to end a foreign policy of permanent war and the use of military weapons, tactics, and values in communities across the country. The values and positions that I've learned in the organization and that I've

diaspora. Really look at these examples where the State has used democratic means. Not just Nazi Germany, not just fascist Italy, but like the contemporary examples of where the State has used the democratic institutions to take power and how people have resisted. That would be a really good place to look.

TSFR: Awesome. Thank you for that. That's really insightful and really thoughtful. I appreciate that answer very much. Well, thanks again for the chat.

we've always done or the inertia of what we've always done or the nostalgia of days past or something like that. Ultimately, we are going to be able to keep each other safe and to get to the other side and build a new world together by making sure that we're safe at our local levels, that we have the ability to support each other at our regional levels, and that we are connected nationally, internationally, with people all over the world who have already been fighting this empire, that have already been fighting these structures of State domination, power structures, and stuff like that. Actually in this moment, it might be better to think at that small level where we're going to have the most impact and where the most impact will come towards us.

TSFR: Cool. Fig, thank you so much for having this conversation. One last thought, you laid out a lot of information of your assessment of how power is realigning and has realigned. Are there any resources that you would want to point people towards getting if they want to do their own reading and get in on following an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian perspective on world affairs? Are there any resources that you would suggest for them doing research? We can always throw stuff in the show notes afterwards, too. I didn't know if anything was popping out for you.

Fig: I will say, there are anarchists and there is political thought that has laid this stuff bare to me years before we got to this point. I think international media is a good resource, just in understanding what's going on. I notice the US media isn't talking about the impacts and what's happening in Europe with this realignment, but the international media is, and so seeking information sources outside of the United States, I think, is really important right now. I would say, it's our goal in this working group I'm in in About Face to be able to produce products and information along these lines, that look at these things. Largely, it is a gap within our movement. The media is not going to take account of this.

Looking at the struggles of Russian leftists, of Turkish leftists, leftists that are in occupied Palestine, in places like Hungary. The Orbán presidency in Hungary is a really good example of the playbook that they are operating off of. So taking an in-depth look as to like how Orbán and his party have gained power and maintained power, and how the State continues to ceremoniously exist, even though it is a democratic-authoritarian government or something. That's the same with Turkey, Israel, and whatnot. Looking at what those resistance movements are and have been in those places as well. There is a possibility that they are successful and they defeat the US left in a significant way, and either folks have to leave, or folks are incarcerated. I will say if that is the level that we allow them to achieve, of domination and control, then we're talking about a generational, long-term fight in order to end and to stop this. It's going to be much harder to exists as a movement in

gained include anti-imperialism and anti-militarism, decolonization. Decolonization I think it's important for me to stay too that involves global reparations. It has taught me what abolition is and to believe in a world where the abolition of militarized police and carceral systems are possible. I've learned international solidarity and have been able to work within the communities that I directly harmed and that are targeted by the US military. I think it's created the space for me to really understand what anti-racism is, what anti-fascism is, and even what transfeminism is.

About Face was formed... Maybe I'm not a good rep because I can't remember the actual date or the year that it was formed, but it was formed largely by a handful of veterans who had participated in the Iraq War and had found themselves in a different type of veteran organizing space, veterans largely from Vietnam or even older conflicts. So with the help of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, they were able to form an organization called Iraq Veterans Against the War. And Iraq Veterans Against the War largely was the organization for organizing. It's the organization that existed when I came in, but through an analysis of the ongoing Global War on Terror, it was realized that, unfortunately, the name could be restrictive by limiting the base of people that we could really organize and bring it into the work. So we made the decision to open it up and change the name to About Face.

We've been active for over 20 years. The Global War on Terror was longer than 20 years. Largely, when I joined and up until recently, a lot of our membership were folks that actually participated in the Iraq War or the Afghan War. But based on the last national gathering that we had of our membership, I realized this is truly an intergenerational organization, and that means it's a truly intergenerational conflict. We have members that are pushing 60, and we have some that are barely 21. I think that really reflects the kind of growth of US military interventionism outside of just the Global War on Terror. Though we are veterans, we're not a veteran service organization like the American Legion or the VFW. We don't solely organize within veteran spaces, but we're part of really many multi-racial and international formations, movements, and sectors that are really struggling to build and create and craft and dream a better world.

TSFR: Can you talk about some of the reasons that people join the US military based on either your experience or anecdotal or any studies that About Face is done on the subject?

Fig: Yeah, for sure. I think I can talk about my reasons, because there's a lot of overlap and similarities with why I have joined, and why other people think of joining. For me, I was literally born into the military. Both my parents were in the Air Force. I was born on an Air Force base in Texas. I was indoctrinated since probably before I could even form a thought. At the same time, there was a deep indoctrination

taking place nationally. I can talk more about that, but the idea being that the military is unquestionable, that it's an institution to be respected and to be admired. It's a way in which I thought I could establish myself, test myself, improve myself, and also serve and protect my family and my country. When I made the decision to join, I was about to graduate college. My degree was rather useless on its own. I was in massive debt. I didn't really have a prospect for anything other than what I had already had and seen, not to mention that it was right at the beginning of the 2008 recession crisis. I didn't really know of any alternatives, because my family, not only being in the military at certain points of time, was also working class people. They had never really been to college or anything like that, so I didn't really have any guidance as to what I could do or what I should do. The military was really attractive to me, not just because I could get my debt from college paid for, but that I could have stability, a career, a job, and it all really fit nicely into the internal narrative that I had created around my familial experiences, of my parents but also my grandparents who fought in World War II. Truth be told, I was really sold on patriarchal and misogynistic reasons. Concepts of honor, leadership, bravery, and courage were things that I actually thought were real and that I could actually live into in the military.

That's obviously, on its own, just extremely individualistic and ego-driven, but I really saw it as my only alternative. At the same time, everything around me in the society, but also my own interpersonal relationships, all kind of reinforced this idea as well. So I got college paid for. I got fed and housed. I got multiple awards and promotions for really just falling in line or just being a good soldier. I think all of that is what they use to feed on and exploit. It ultimately boils down to the weaponization of people's innate desire to help and to serve each other. It's the exploitation, the extraction, of that service drive for what largely is economic stock prices and resource control and extraction. We talk about the cop inside our head, these types of social conditioning that exist. I think that the social conditioning around the military and veterans is extremely deep and very present now. Recognizing that it wasn't like this before, that this has been an implicit strategy following the Vietnam War in order to make it unacceptable for society to resist the US military. I would say that even with anarchists and leftists, I see some of this imperial pathology play out sometimes. It could be an inability to really critique or understand a parent's involvement in it, or saying, "I don't support the military, but I support the people, or something along those lines. That type of really pathological decision making or support for things just prolongs it.

TSFR: I've heard expressed by Black veterans, for instance, that there's an element of civic nationalism associated with it where they're like, "I am constantly having my right to be here or participate in the society challenged.

Broadly, for everyone, this mass firing, this chaos that is being caused, for every threat, there is an opportunity. So this is a great time to just be organizing, to be talking to your neighbors. Personally, I don't think I can stop or really have any inner interdiction into what the power structures are doing right now at such a big level. But I do know that if I am going to experience violence, if my community is going to experience violence or repercussions from this, it's going to happen at my local level. So connecting to and finding those people that are around you, that are local to you, and those projects that are looking at building alternatives, such as mutual aid, housing solidarity, food justice, these are words that have literally been made wrong to say by the administration, but that's because they are a threat to this mentality. Getting connected to anything that is in movement for and with a vision towards a better life and a new world is absolutely important right now. We should make space for people like that. But also, we have to be cautious of this moment too, because there are a lot of people who might be harmed, who want to do something, but they're not value-aligned with us. Make the space for veterans and for military folks within our organizing spaces, but hold them accountable and ensure that they're there based on the values and in alignment with the values of you and that better world.

On the "Nonprofit Industrial Complex MovementTM" side of things, I don't have a lot of hope necessarily coming from that space, because that space has not done anything to stop us from getting here in the first place. The difference between neoliberals and neocons was really erased when the Harris campaign asked you to vote alongside Dick Cheney's endorsement, right? Those systems are the same and they were largely and resoundingly rejected. The structures and the systems and the people that couldn't even make a decision to deny genocide are not going to save democracy or whatever. They're going to figure out how it is that they exist in this and maintain their power structures. We have to have extra caution around the nonprofit industrial complex, because I think a lot of these federal employees that are being let go, yeah, they might enter private military, but they're also going to be brought into the "MovementTM" into the nonprofit industrial complex. They might say that they're security experts, safety experts, that they have this knowledge base and so that they are the ones who are rightfully the ones to work against these things, right? That doesn't mean they're value-aligned. That doesn't mean that their vision for anything other than the neoliberal order is there. We have to have caution in this moment.

Also there's a level of patience. I would never advocate for people not to do what is necessary, what they believe to be necessary, and by any means, but I think it's important to realize, even though it's been a month, we're still kind of in day zero of this. So understanding what the repercussions and the blow back of our actions are, and making sure that our actions are actually strategic and not just what

of this. When they committed a war crime in the middle of an intersection, and all of the people who did that were freed and not prosecuted by the State of Iraq at the time or the US. So there's great standoff ability for them to separate themselves from some of that harder work. We see this too, because GEO Group, CoreCivic, these private prison companies are already being integrated back into federal detention and federal incarceration systems. Those groups specifically are going to play a bigger role, most definitely, in both external military force projection, but also the domestic operations that are occurring.

TSFR: Thank you very much for all this information and for getting these wheels rolling. I've really enjoyed the conversation. I wonder, do you have a sense of where it's good for those of us that don't want this world that seems to be present in front of us, or building in front of us, how we can get involved in struggling against it? Are there any things that maybe movement isn't focusing on that they should or places we should be paying attention to or ways that we could be organizing amongst ourselves that would be helpful starting points for building a like a counter power? It seems like talking to veterans around these issues, especially if there's a lot of people are getting laid off from their jobs from the federal government, they might seek employment in private military contracting firms. They're probably already kind of lost if they're considering that, but do you have any suggestions for where we go from here?

Fig: I have thoughts. I feel the answer is obviously way bigger than I can conceptualize, but I'll speak to veterans and people who are in the military right now. The best place to start is to reach out and to contact About Face, to reach out and contact the GI Rights Hotline, Military Law Task Force for sure, and to utilize those as entry points into this. For folks that are considering and weighing the options of joining the military right now, I would highly, highly suggest and recommend don't. Just don't. Your life is not going to be better from that decision, no matter how much benefits and money they hang in front of you. For family members and friends that have people considering or are already in or are veterans, make sure that you aren't writing these people out of your life and that you are using this as a moment to put your finger in the hole of moral injury that I'm sure people are feeling around this stuff and giving it a little wiggle. For me, and I think this is true largely of the federal workforce, too, it took me losing a soldier in Afghanistan to actually humanize my experience. For a lot of people to make such broad ideological shifts, it is something that takes a specific catalyst to do that. These idiots threatening your life and your livelihood should be that catalyst to look at that and to use as the starting point in order to resist this.

Military service is one way that my family, generationally, has proven that it's a part of the social fabric of the US and has a right to be here." Also, in the past at least, there's been a road towards citizenship through military service available to folks who were not born within the US or don't have citizenship otherwise. Is that right? Are those motivators?

Fig: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's absolutely true. I don't want to speak to the specifics of other people, but I served with an entirely diverse workforce of people from all backgrounds, nationalities, and ethnicities, indigenous folks and black folks and non-citizens as well. Though that is true, that is a way in which to engage or prove oneself within the context of the empire and the State, there are also veterans who have been deported because they are non-citizens. There's extreme racism and violence within the military. The structures are largely built off of aristocratic/working class class structures between officers and enlisted. It's clearly evident now that the Trump administration is going to do everything it can to ensure that any minority or identity or person is going to have a very difficult time and probably not be able to establish themselves in any meaningful way. They're calling it DEI, or a purge of DEI, but largely it's just a recapture of these structures through a white supremacist lens. So though that is true, and I think that speaks to the lack of alternatives that we have both been sold and that have been created, it's not the truth of the of the system itself.

TSFR: Just to touch on this again, back in 2013, I spoke with Eddie Falcon, who was in Iraq Veterans Against the War. One of the reasons that he said he joined was to escape drugs, to escape bad home life, to escape what he saw as a lack of educational and job opportunities around him, which you've mentioned already. I think that's a really poignant thing to touch on. It's not a great thing that the military. It's that these things are not provided otherwise, and it scoops up a lot of mostly working class folks into that framework to be churned for the machine.

I've heard people talk about the military as the biggest socialist institution in the US, which I'm sure was in a very tongue-in-cheek manner of talking about this. Can you talk about some of its history in terms of veteran support, pay scale, job training, access to GI Bill elements, as if you were describing them to someone joining in the military? What are the day to day realities of these economic benefits that they're supposed to be receiving?

Fig: You know, even when I was inside, people would refer to the military as the largest communist organization in the United States or something like that. Nation

States do have to socialize their military, and so the idea that you get medical care, the idea that they want you to have benefits that allow you to transition and move away from the military, whether that's through the GI bill or through a VA home loan, access to certain types of grants, that's all that's all necessary in order to recruit, but it's also necessary to ensure that when people leave, they don't experience life in a way that drives them to turn that knowledge and skill and the experiences they have in the military around. I can't really speak to the healthcare aspect of things. I can say in my experience, healthcare in the military is largely not that great overall. Personally, I don't receive benefits. I don't receive veteran health care or anything like that. That process of even getting there is extremely difficult. It's adversarial. So as a veteran with PTSD, tinnitus, other types of medical fallout from all of that, I was denied care multiple times in a period of crisis. One time, I went to the VA and tried to talk to somebody to seek support, and it took 60 days for them to follow up with me after that. Thankfully, I was able to work through that crisis, but the entire process of trying to receive benefits is really trying to justify your experience. And it's limited. You can't really go into the VA and talk to a therapist about how much you hate the military and how violent you think it is because that person across from you is employed by the military or is a service member themselves.

I joined the Army Reserve, which is a reserve component of the active duty military. The active duty military is the full-time. Every single day you live on a base, you work on a base. Your whole life is like that. Reserve in the National Guard, which is largely controlled by the States and are in State service until they're federalized. When you join the reserve in the National Guard, the idea is that you're kind of like a part-time soldier. You part-time participate in it. When I joined, it was sold as one week a month, two weeks in the summer, which was absolutely not true at the most base level. There's no benefit in being part-time in that type of world. You're just really setting yourself up for a lot of problems, at home, at work, all these things. Whatever your recruiter tells you, don't believe it. Largely, I would say that's true. It's an administrative bureaucracy. It's a bureaucracy that is established largely based on time in or interpersonal relationships. So people have a tendency to weaponize position and power. Even though you have these things that we are told are representative of stability and a life and a career, there's nothing really stable about it. It's definitely not any structure that's reinforcing what would be a positive or beneficial life. Now I think people experience that. Handfuls of people, dozens of people, but those are individualized experiences. When you look across the board, most lower enlisted soldiers are on other types of federal support, to include food stamps and WIC. You are oftentimes away from your family, so whatever home instability that you think you're creating, you're not a part of it.

The military healthcare system is extremely messed up. When I entered into basic training, there were some people that were left over from the last cycle

TSFR: Yeah, Pinkertons is what I was thinking, but Baldwin-Felts too, using private security forces for this sort of back and forth between private and public. There's obviously a long history of that in the US for infrastructure, but it seems like there is a push towards the private in some very clear ways. You saw this showing up in at the pipeline struggle in Standing Rock. You've seen them operate in various other areas domestically in the US when you've got someone like Eric Prince reintegrated back into the administration (this is kind of the waters that he swims in), running Xe or whatever it's called now [Constellis]. Could you talk a bit about accountability of US soldiers in action, accountability of private soldiers, and where the PMCs fit into the shifts that are going on right now?

Fig: That's a really good question. When I really think about it, I think about even privateers during the American Revolution who were private ship captains that the US used to attack the British. This is deeply embedded into the framework of the State. It's just really important to step into a conservative mindset. It's baked into that ideology that the government is inefficient and that private business is efficient, right? So we have the use of Private Military Contractors to carry out military operations or just to process the medical paperwork necessary for people who are in the service. My experience when I was in Afghanistan, and largely for the majority of the Afghan conflict, there was a larger amount of Private Military Contractors in Afghanistan than there ever was military. These private companies allow for standoff from the US. The US could say, "We only have 40,000 troops in Afghanistan" when in reality, the force structure is more like 85-100,000 people in Afghanistan. They're just private contractors, and so they don't count, evidently.

We see this deeply integrated into the law enforcement structures, like you were pointing out. TigerSwan, Triple Canopy is a group, Blackwater is a group. The local and state law enforcement have deep relationships with all types of contractors or private military companies. Fusion Centers are going to have, not just state and local law enforcement, but they're going to have PMC personnel that are also part of that. Then what you're pointing out is PMCs aren't just an aspect of the militant part of the military, but they do everything. The belief is that it's more efficient. Whereas people used to be able to join the military and do the laundry. It used to be that in the military, you had a soldier whose job was to do the laundry. Now in my experience in both Iraq and Afghanistan, that was contracted out.

The private industry integration into both the DOD and law enforcement structures is already well established with this kind of mentality of attacking the administrative and bureaucratic parts of the State. It's absolutely their goal to just replace those with defense contracts or with contracts and civilians. They don't have to offer the same types of benefits. Like I said, there's standoff distance, and largely they can wash their hands of whatever is done. Blackwater is a really good example

thoughts around this because it's happening in real time—is that they are purging the federal government. Any time a dictator comes into place, they purge the military, they purge academia and stuff. All of the Joint Chiefs have been fired. All of the top lawyers at the DOD have been fired. This indicates that they're looking to put into place yes people to agree with them to remove any type of internal legal boundaries to whatever decisions that they're going to make into the future. Regardless of if this purge of federal employees is legal or illegal based on what the courts decide, what is true is that a number of people in the federal government that have clearances, that have access to critical security information, have now been dumped unexpectedly, without a job, without a way to provide for their families, and have been made fun of and ridiculed all the way out the door as well. When you take that into consideration with the idea, which Hegseth did say, that they want to lower the amount of active duty personnel in the military, you have a similar situation of this population that has military experience being dumped into the world without a means of providing for their families. What GWOT showed is that when they disbanded the Iraqi army after the invasion, you now had a population of people who had these skills and no recourse. Their actions, regardless of how successful they are in this moment, is increasing the level of risk to us here, either through terror attacks or through certain types of collusion that open the US up for terror attacks. All of this stuff is happening under a concept of hybrid warfare, so it doesn't have to be a terror attack, but it could be a cyberattack that shuts down decisive, important infrastructure. The cutting of the Internet cables in the Baltic Sea is a good example of this. So all of this realignment that is taking place right now is most definitely increasing the risk of militant, armed violence within the United States. It's also rewriting the systems that we've been conditioned to believe are present. It's all directed towards this intense militarization and policing of our hemisphere and specifically of the US homeland.

TSFR: One of the big changes that appeared to be occurring throughout the Global War on Terror as pushed by the neocons (it could be that the neoliberals under Clinton already planted seeds for this) was, while there was at times, reduction of military employees, there was an increase in the use of PMCs, of Private Military Contractors. There was a huge amount of profits that was extracted from Halliburton, which was attached to Cheney, just for running infrastructure, not even for necessarily running soldiers out there or security forces that were privatized and operating under the banner of the US Army. But we've seen also, an increase of private security. It's not a new thing. There's been things like...

Fig: The Baldwin-Felts and the Pinkertons?

of basic training folks to come through. Come to find out, the two people that were there were both on medical hold for injuries that they sustained. They were being released from the military. One person specifically was on a medical hold for going in for a hernia surgery and basically losing a testicle instead, because the doctors made a mistake on that. So because of the structure of time and service versus knowledge and professionalism, I suppose, for doctors or for dentists and stuff like that, largely those people who stay in that long are people who have institutionalized themselves and are outside of kind of where we anticipate every day medical standards to be. So that's the really direct example.

TSFR: Okay, so the folks that are really getting a good treatment through the system, and not just being churned through, oftentimes are people that are career and have gotten into positions that create a bubble that's different from the experience of the majority of people that join the military for a four year stint and then leave. Is that correct?

Fig: I would say absolutely. And it is like what you're saying. It is simply a matter of churning. I have tinnitus, right? I lost my hearing over the course of my time in. The last time that I deployed, I deployed to Afghanistan. Part of that deployment process is you have to go through medical examination. So I went through a hearing exam, and I failed it, and then I failed it again, and then I failed it again. But because I needed to deploy with my unit, eventually, they just tested me until I passed. I realized part of this process associated with my moral injury and the examination of that is that there really is nothing that you could do in the military, no job, no role, and no action that you can do that isn't simply about maintaining your readiness to deploy and force readiness. So if you go in and you think, "Well, I'm just going to learn human resources and be an admin assistant," that processing of paperwork ensures that people deploy or that people go to war, that the system continues. If you're a supply sergeant and you order pencils, that pencil is ultimately towards some aspect of making sure that people are ready to go to war and to participate in that. It really is a matter of churning. If people choose to stay in and they are able to really be political for 20 years, then, yes, there are benefits that are acquired through healthcare or through pay and housing and all of that. But the majority of folks don't spend 20 years in the military, and the majority of the experiences are really always going to be about just churning you out to make sure that you're ready or to go and do it.

TSFR: For as much as this country talks up pride in its veterans, from the very foundation... And none of this concern that I'm expressing is meant to be overshadowing the terrible work that people are doing by serving in the

military or the machinations of the Department of Defense or whatever. Not saying that suppression of indigenous populations or of rebellions or of democratic movements in other countries, anything like this, is surmounted by my concern for how veterans are treated, but I think it's a separate issue that's important. People join for all sorts of reasons and get talked into this thing. They get sold a false bill of goods. I think it's important to discuss that bill of goods if that can possibly get people to further a conversation and maybe choose against or have a more educated decision of if they're going to join the military or not. Just to sort of throw that caveat out there. Is that fair?

Fig: Yeah, absolutely fair. Really, the history of veterans benefits stems from the fallout of the use of veterans to do all of the these things. There's a really famous example of the Bonus Army and their occupation of Washington, DC, trying to get benefits that were promised to them during their services in World War I. They occupied DC. They demanded their benefits, they marched. At relatively the same time, the business class was trying to undermine or to commit a coup against FDR, in general, and wanted to use those forces. Largely, what we see as the benefits of service, or sold as the benefits of service, really stem from what you're saying. It's forcing people into these situations and then into these actions, and then having no nothing established or nothing to really hold people in line following. So there was a real threat during the Bonus Army of an insurrection in DC. There were many lines moving against that. We start to see these benefits and these promises that we have modern concept of now begin to materialize. That continued largely with World War II. We saw an entire post-war investment into this huge, largely male population that led to the baby boom, that led to the military industrial complex being established as it is now. The same thing with Vietnam. It became some sort of national shame, the fact that people didn't want to respect or didn't show respect to people participating in a largely illegal and extremely violent war. It just kind of continues. It's a machine, it's adapting, and it's doing what it can to prolong itself. Getting rid of the draft was not because anybody in power really thought that was necessarily a good idea, but it was absolutely necessary in order to quell civil dissent from both within the ranks and from within the civilian population. I think that type of experience with the military is now also undergoing a transition due to the type of geopolitical and global threats that exist in this in this moment.

TSFR: You've got the example of the Bonus Army, but back to the Revolutionary War there were banks coming out to collect on payments not made from soldiers that had served or were serving in the military who couldn't collect their food in their farms' fields because they were out fighting.

Ultimately, my assessment is that basically the Trump administration is aligning with and shifting the global hegemonic structures right now. That shift is away from a unipolar world, recognizing that is not possible, into a multi-polar control of the world, probably based on certain aspects of hemispheres. Three poles is what I would say: the US and our hemisphere; European domination, largely being in the sphere of Russia, as Russia and Putin work towards the restoration of their own imperial borders and goals; and then the Pacific. It seems like Trump is largely okay with this pole being situated around China. The idea is to contain it by what would be an anti-Sino alliance called the petty despot club. China can probably be contained. Largely this was the GWOT strategy, as well. The refocus towards the Pacific was to contain it through alliances with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, and especially India. I have no direct example or evidence for this, but I would say a red flag or decision point that I would be looking towards in the future to confirm or deny these feelings would be what China does with Taiwan and what the US response to that is. Trump has aligned himself with despots, be it Putin or Erdoğan or Netanyahu, that are all actively working right now to expand their borders and to expand the borders of the nation state. The idea that the US wouldn't be looking to do that as well would be a failure to connect the dots in that analysis.

Outside of those poles, Trump and Jared Kushner worked really hard on this during the first administration. The activity and the actions of Turkey over the past eight years, ten years, 20 years under Erdoğan, really demonstrate how it is and the language and the justifications that can be used to expand borders. What they worked so hard to do is put together these Abraham Accords. When looking at these three main poles, you have the Middle East, which is about basically undoing Sykes-Picot national borders and allowing for the Abraham Accords to basically deescalate the tension between Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, and orientate that spot towards Iran, which both Trump and Netanyahu have directly expressed a desire to strike and to go after. Largely, what would be called the Global South remains the greatest point of extraction and exploitation of global capital and these militaries, the biggest difference being that it's only going to be worse, because the international law in these kind of norms of neoliberal extraction and exploitation of the Global South are being rewritten. Transnational capitalism is just going to be more unencumbered under this new model that they're looking for. All of that to say, I think what we're seeing is a de-escalation of the potential of direct total war between the US, NATO, and our previous allies with Russia, into what is a more manageable state of capturing moving borders, securing access to resources, the use of trade and the threat of military force to exact economic and resource concessions.

One thing that also falls into that and is really critical—I don't have full

All of this is laid out in Project 2025. It's broken down by each federal bureaucracy. So I really encourage people to look at that, to read that, and to apply this lens to it. This is a restructuring in order to do things differently than what was done before. If we continue to remain in this mentality that the structures that we've been conditioned into will somehow protect us or somehow stop this, that is going to allow us to be caught on our back foot. I also just want to say that worst case scenario planning is not for everybody. Especially when the information environment is so overwhelming all the time, coupled with the overwhelming nature of just existing, this type of talk and this type of thinking can really be triggering for a lot of folks. That doesn't mean that it shouldn't happen and it shouldn't be happening at all levels possible. I think that aspect is really important.

As for what you were saying about the Monroe Doctrine, I think that is absolutely correct. It looks like the US has taken on an isolationist position. Tariffs are a sign of that isolationism and the undermining and destruction of neoliberal international finance as it has been since the fall of the Soviet Union. Additionally, it's about Manifest Destiny. It's about the white supremacist goals of the far-right that have existed in this country forever. When the admin has chosen to align itself with Russia, but at the same time threaten what were once strategic allies, there is a reason to that. It's not a troll, and it's not just a campaign promise. They're spending all of their resources on this. Canada, Greenland, Panama Canal, and Mexico are all areas of strategic and decisive domination that the US has to have moving into this new phase in this new world that we're moving into. Canada represents a huge supply of timber, of oil. Greenland is strategic in the sense of its position in the northern hemisphere, along melting shipping lanes. Also, all of the types of minerals that are necessary in a tech-centric or tech dystopia can be found in Greenland. Panama Canal represents strategic point, a decisive point really, in the global economy and projection of the US military on both sides of the isthmus, of the Pacific and Atlantic sides. Then Mexico itself is not just the entry point for migration. The border area is heavily industrialized. China and other countries have a deep investment into that area in order to develop and manufacture things and avoid certain types of import costs or the costs of moving things across the Pacific. The cartels and immigration just serve as a vehicle for them to project their force onto that area. Not to mention that Mexico is led largely by a left movement and by a woman. With dictators, you always have to take into account their ego into, too. All of that talk and all of that focus, if we look past it being just some sort of troll or some sort of threat, and look the military and imperial goals for those places, it's like very clear that they are serious about making Canada the 51st state. They are serious about taking control of Greenland because they view it within their strategic worldview as absolutely necessary. That works really nicely with this concept, with Manifest Destiny and this concept of isolation.

Fig: Shay's Rebellion, actually, the first rebellion against the United States, was in carried out in response to false promises to veterans.

TSFR: Or you had the denial of treatment for injury from Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. It took a very long time for veterans and health officials organizing to be able to get the DOD to recognize that cancer was caused by these chemicals, let alone to the populations that they were dropped on, but they just refused to pay that out. I wonder if you could talk about how you have seen the institution changing through and beyond the war on terror, in terms of how it treats the soldiers within it, or the folks that are leaving it.

Fig: I suppose I don't really know, because my distance from the internal side of things has been a lot since I decided to leave. I can speak though, because an answer to that statement two months ago would be completely different now, based on what is happening. If I was considering joining or if I was in the military in this moment, I would have a high level of anxiety. I would have a high level of anxiety of being ordered to carry out illegal orders. I would have a high level anxiety of being put into some sort of national global conflict, not necessarily total war or anything like that, but having to participate in genocides, like in Palestine, having to maybe even find yourself aligned next to Russian Imperial soldiers, or something along those lines, in the near future. There's this deep push to cut both the Department of Defense civilian employees, but also a direct attack on the so-called benefits of service as well.

The current head of the DOD is so ridiculously unqualified for the role and the position as it was, but when you look at the fact that he's a rubber stamp, he's a talking head, he may be the exact person for what it is that they want to do with the DOD. The force reductions that are being talked about in Europe and elsewhere don't necessarily mean that it will be a force reduction in the overall size of the US military. It's would be a reduction within those locations. Folks in Europe could be repositioned to the US in order to carry out US Northern Commands mission of sealing the border and fighting the cartels, at this point, aiding in deportation and in the building, construction, and maintenance of concentration camps, being put into the streets against civilians and people that are trying to resist things.

So I would have a great amount of anxiety if I was in, and I would have a great amount of discernment to recognize that joining the military right now is not what anybody should be thinking about or really doing or moving towards. The ability to serve the your community, the ability to be in line with something that is liberating and free does not exist within that structure at all right now. I can't speak

to if it's any easier to get VA healthcare. My experience has been no. But is that even necessary? Or is that even a reality, necessarily, if the current administration is successful in this strategic realignment undermining of neoliberalism that's taking place?

TSFR: I wonder if we could talk for a minute about tools that are available for people or good resources, if someone has been considering and started the process of working with a recruiter, or if they're in the ROTC, or maybe they're in the National Guard and they're hoping to just get through with their head down, or maybe they're fully in and deployed. Can you talk a little bit about some of the resources that are out there for figuring out what next steps might be if someone does want to separate themselves from the military?

Fig: Absolutely. As a first resource, getting in contact with About Face. We have a website. We have an email address. Get in contact with About Face. It was actually About Face, along with the GI Rights Hotline that helped me get out. I was able to leave before the end of my contract. I was able to leave by going into what's called the Individual Ready Reserve, which is an inactive reserve component, due to the PTSD and stuff that I had. The GI Rights Hotline was largely able to advise me afterwards. In About Face, we have folks that are members that have been successful in declaring conscientious objection. I didn't go that way, but you can still do that. There are folks who have tried to get out and have really suffered. That's a reality of the situation. It's a giant bureaucratic behemoth that you can oftentimes find the administrative lines to slip and cracks to fall through or to move through, but that's not the case.

For me, my decision was regardless of the fallout that I experienced. It is in no way equivalent to what I had done to the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. Even though I wasn't everywhere in the world, part of that, that system and that process. The organization supports people. Daniel Hale was a member of About Face. We've done work with Reality Winner who was a service member and whistleblower that has been imprisoned for leaking information around the last Trump election. We have support structures, and also there's been a lot of work, but we really have a community that can hold the complexity and create the space for people to hold the complexity of what it means to have served and to care for each other and to show up for each other and work through that. The GI Rights Hotline, and then I'm less familiar with them but the Military Law Task Force is also a really good resource for understanding what the legal aspects of things are. I'm not a lawyer, so I can't really coach anybody on what to do, but I can say call the GI Rights Hotline. Those folks are much more informed.

with increased rhetoric of facing off with internal enemies. Most recently, what sticks is my head is the attempt to determine Black Lives Matter or antifascists as being a domestic terrorist threat. There's been this build up towards drawing back infrastructure in order to place it internally and maybe to the southern border. I've heard some people talk about how this doesn't seem like a very practicable thing, especially liberals pointing to all of the cuts that are being made within the military, and how are they going to do this? How are they going to open up Guantanamo and put 30,000 people there when they're cutting all this funding and cutting back programs? And stuff like that. Can you talk a little bit about this? I guess I just covered a lot, but if you want to address any of that, I'm probably just going to edit my question harshly afterwards, because that was a lot.

Fig: I want to answer all of that. We should have took notes. Specifically to that last thing that you said, about this liberal idea that it can't be done, I think that is such a detriment and a roadblock, a sandbag, to our ability to actually right size to the moment. My personal feelings and assessment is that the US State has, since its existence, demonstrated that it is willing to kill as many people and destroy as much of life in this earth as is necessary in order to dominate and to control what it feels like it needs to control. That, historically, is true. COVID clearly laid that out for us. The prioritization of the US Empire is not life. By removing this block in our heads that there's some aspect of this State that is orientated towards protecting or securing or stabilizing anything in this world is just a misconception. So yes, as the State stood three months ago, perhaps the promises and the commitments and actions that are being taken now are not possible. I heard an analysis, and that analysis was like, "well, it's too expensive, right?" Well, they've done all of this federal freezing, and they've cut foreign aid as well. Whatever that imaginary money is doing right now, it can be redirected towards these things. I've heard there's not enough law enforcement to carry this out. Well, they're deputizing literally everybody that they can including the IRS, the State Department, some of Elon Musk's own personal security has now been deputized as US Marshals, local law enforcement, and depending on what type of order status, National Guard can also support in making arrests. Based on the old order, that didn't make sense. How could they ever have the person power to do that, right? But they are rewriting the structure of the State in order to meet that goal. It's really important for us in this moment, to realize that the full operational efficiency and maturity of their vision is not in place. It's only been a month roughly of them in power, and there are very foundational things that they have to do, people they have to get into place, that is still taking place. They won't be able to operate at full efficiency until they've shored up the administrative structure that is necessary.

that are super important and at play is law enforcement. There exist within these structures the ability for governors to send their law enforcement to another state. Under certain types of jurisdictions, those police would have jurisdiction within that other state. Largely, that's how we've seen a lot of the already militarized response to immigration take place for decades now. Texas has been actively sending its National Guard. It has its own State Guard, which is outside of all of that structure, only answerable to the to the governor. They work in collaboration with other states sending their own law enforcement or national guards to support in that work already.

I even attended a briefing on the laws of use of the National Guard, and what is really clear to me is that even with existing guard rails in place, those can be worked around. And if they can't be worked around, we have a clear indication that those will just be ignored by the current administration, and it seems like largely the courts as well. That makes things harder, but I think it drives home that this is a paradigm shift. Some of the structures of the previous iteration of the neoliberal State, some of those rather ceremonious ideas around division of power, separation of power, aren't actually a helpful framework for us thinking about what could happen now. There are still things that have to happen for that to become fully actualized or to realize, "Oh, they're just spinning their wheels in a place where they can't actually win." But what it is that I'm seeing is that this reconsolidation of the administrative State under Project 2025, Musk, and Trump is rewriting what is possible. Part of the tactic of why things are so quick and so constant is the idea that we just do it, do it now, and don't ask for forgiveness later.

TSFR: Just the move fast and break things ethos.

So as you mentioned, one of the terms that keeps making its way around more and more, Make America Great Again has been a slogan for a while, but you've heard the words America First being uttered by people associated with the administration or the MAGA movement, which hearkens back to a pre-World War II fascist movement in the United States. Notably, Charles Lindbergh was one of the big faces and voices behind that. The approach towards militarism that was discussed under the America First approach was to pull back US Troops from other places around the world and return to an isolationism or worry about the existing borders or expanding the existing borders or the sphere of influence of the United States, maybe peeling it back to the Monroe Doctrine, ideas of taking more control in areas in this hemisphere that are outside of the US State proper. We've been seeing this withdrawal from international treaties, threats against international courts by the Trump administration, support of dictators abroad,

It's important for people that are in the military or that are thinking about it, but also, usually, within two or three degrees of separation, people have some sort of intersection with the military, be it a cousin, a childhood friend, or anything along those lines who are also considering this. Even if you you're not in the military. Even if you hate the military, there's probably somebody around you that is involved in that. So using those places as resources as well. I definitely have written letters to youth that are considering joining. I've talked very honestly and directly about my experiences to people who are considering joining. I do what I can to undermine that mystique and to destroy that stuff. I think if family members or friends are hearing this too, those resources are available for you to think about and to think about what you can do to intervene in those relationships to make sure that folks don't join.

TSFR: I wonder if you could speak a bit about how the military has changed since the Global War on Terror (or GWOT) following 911, in terms of the scope of the Department of Defense activity, theaters of engagement and occupation, and the structure of the organization.

Fig: For sure. I think the Global War on Terror (GWOT) really represented a paradigm shift in the structure and focus of at least the intelligence and law enforcement aspect of the State domestically, and GWOT largely changed the way in which the DOD and military has seen and executed its role externally, in support of and in defense of the empire. There's multiple presidencies and administrations during GWOT, and so even though they were staffed or manned by different parties, the overall trajectory of hegemonic military force projection was relatively the same. It focused on securing markets, resources, and labor for global economics, American and Western European finance, and for containment of China or the Chinese State. That shift away from a heavy focus on Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East that came post-911 from Bush, pivoted during the Obama administrations towards the Pacific. Obama didn't resolve the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. They expanded into Syria. We had the mass uprisings of the Arab Spring, and so largely that pivot was something that was a little delayed and diverted.

Then when Trump came in, Trump's first administration was largely hemmed in by the existing structures and forces within the DOD and other parts of the government. He wasn't able to make some of the major changes that he wanted to the structure and focus of the military. He did expand and limit the level of approval for certain types of military strikes, so we saw a huge increase in civilian deaths on the battlefield under the first Trump administration. We saw a heavy focus on Joint Special Operation forces, and that's most definitely what we can expect kind of from him going forward. Largely, I would say that the structure of the

military, and the focus of the military, to speak to Biden's term, it has been about containment and the stopping of Russia. A lot of military resources went into the war in Ukraine, as well as all of these other small wars and proxy wars that the US has already been engaged in.

With Trump's new administration, with Peter Hegseth and the influence and the restructuring due to Project 2025, the moment that we have right now is significantly different. The biggest carryover and correlation from the way that GWOT was executed to now is this concept called military operations other than war, also known MOOTW. If war exists on a spectrum between what the nation State determines to be peace and total war, which would be the total orientation of the State, its society and economy towards a war effort, then MOOTW is that space in between. There are lots of different names for MOOTW operations. The majority of the GWOT, minus probably the invasions, were all considered military operations other than war. Humanitarian, disaster relief efforts, those can be considered military operations other than war. Specifically, the national emergencies that Trump has declared through executive order regarding cartel violence and immigration is a military operation other than war.

The biggest difference between the before time and this time with that is that largely the active DOD controlled, active military, has been pretty restricted on how it operates and what its missions and goals are in regards to the US homeland. By declaring a national emergency around cartel violence and stuff, what they've basically done is created a military operation other than war. They have redirected a lot of energy and effort of the actual DOD military towards that effort. Specifically the command that is in charge of the US homeland is called US Northern Command or USNORTHCOM. The difference is NORTHCOM's mission now is to seal the southern border with the United States, so it is begun to shift and realign itself to carry out that mission.

Sealing the border, it's really important to know, is not just about sealing it in one direction. I quite clearly think it's about sealing it in both directions and allowing the space for the military to conduct more activity and operations in the US in support of these executive orders around the national emergency. What that means is that we would anticipate increased use of National Guard units, but also the inclusion of active duty units, the ability to use these intelligence and surveillance types of assets against the US population, as long as they are able to be identified within the boundaries of the national emergency declaration and a pre-positioning of the forces needed to carry out, say, increased activity that would come with the declaration of the Insurrection Act or the illegal Alien Enemies Act. So right now, what we're seeing is really the strategic shift of both priority focus and goals, but also of assets, resources, and personnel in ways that we haven't seen before. I'm not totally even able to think of a time where the US military was carrying

out such active military operations on such a large scale in the United States, at least in my lifetime.

TSFR: Can you talk a little bit (again, not a lawyer, right?) about some of the historical and constitutional restrictions on deploying the military on US soil that have been seen as a limitation in the past to what we're seeing on the southern border right now?

Fig: The law that exists that restricts the use of the US military on the US homeland is the Posse Comitatus Act. I learned very quickly, just being in the military, that Posse Comitatus, though it does explicitly stop the use of certain types of military strategies against the US population, that it doesn't insulate or protect the population, and it hasn't, from being targeted with the assistance of the military. There are times in which military assets have been utilized to support law enforcement. I could think of the Boston bombing incident as one of the first times that I heard about it. They used these military aerial reconnaissance and surveillance platforms in order to try and track who they thought were the bombers. There's many examples of this. Edward Snowden talked about the kind of intelligence infrastructure that was aligned and being utilized against US citizens and people abroad everywhere. What that highlighted, was "Okay, you can't do this, but we have FISA." So for every rule that is there to protect people from this stuff, those rules are able to be bent and broken, or just bypassed.

Just even with the George Floyd uprisings and Trump's first presidency, they didn't have to declare the Insurrection Act to deploy the military to DC. They used other legal frameworks to do that. Largely, a lot of power for the use and control of National Guard, and also the way in which National Guard can be used, actually sits with state governors. You have this whole structure of the federal DOD military that is controlled ultimately by the President, but then you have National Guard that is ultimately controlled by the state. When they're under the control of the state, they can do arrests. It's called Title 32 orders. Usually active duty, federalized troops are under Title 10 orders. Under Title 10 orders, Posse Comitatus is a limiting factor as to what can be done. Under Title 32 orders, that limiting factor is way more reduced. So National Guard soldiers can do a lot of things. Let's hypothetically say that a state refused to participate in mass deportation efforts or any other type of effort. Trump could federalize the National Guard of that state in order to carry out that operation, though that would probably face a lot of push back. But Trump could also just lean on, say, the Texas governor to send their National Guard under their Title 32 orders to that state without ever having to federalize them. Or they have the option of federalizing them and sending them as well.

When it comes to domestic security, some of the other factors